

Recognizing Workplace Violence: Training for Immigrant Workers

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Training Objectives

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1. To recognize workplace violence and the four categories of violence perpetrators
2. To recognize five indicators of escalating behavior and possible coping strategies
3. To discuss protection strategies using examples for immigrant women workers
4. To introduce incident reporting resources for workers

What is considered a workplace?

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- A workplace is any location, either permanent or temporary, where you are assigned to work. This can include buildings and their surroundings (for example, parking lots)
- For home care workers, this also includes clients' homes, as well as traveling to and from work assignments

What is Workplace Violence?

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- Workplace violence is behavior that **verbally or physically threatens, attacks or injures workers**
- Workplace violence extends along a spectrum of severity, ranging from harassment and threats to assault, murder and terrorism
- Even non-physical forms of violence may cause stress, fear, and negative health effects among victims

What are some examples of Workplace Violence?

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- Inappropriate remarks such as abusive or offensive language, gestures or other discourteous conduct, delusional statements
- Psychological/ Emotional abuse or threats
- Threatening or obscene phone calls
- Disorderly conduct such as shouting, throwing objects, punching walls or slamming doors
- Being followed, sworn at, or shouted at
- Domestic violence
- Intimidation
- Harassment
- Rape
- Beatings/Stabbings/ Shootings
- Suicides or near suicides

How Common is Workplace Violence?

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1. According to congressional testimony at a House Subcommittee hearing in 2002:
 - A. Approximately 18,000 workplace assaults per week
 - B. 18% of all crimes committed, occur in the workplace
 - C. Workplace violence is the number one cause of workplace fatalities for women.

How Common is Workplace Violence?

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According to a survey by the Department of Labor in 2005:

- Five percent of all workplaces, including State and local governments, had a violent incident *within the past 12 months*
- Half of the largest employers (employing 1,000 or more workers) reported an incident
- Among these largest employers in private industry, goods-producing industries reported a higher percentage of co-worker violence than service-providing industries
- Service- providing industries reported much higher percentages of criminal, customer, and domestic violence than goods-producing industries

How many people are victims of non-fatal assaults on the job each year?

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2,000,000 workers are victims each year in the U.S.

Which workers are most at risk?

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Retail, restaurant, health/home care and social service workers face an increased risk of work-related assaults stemming from several factors.

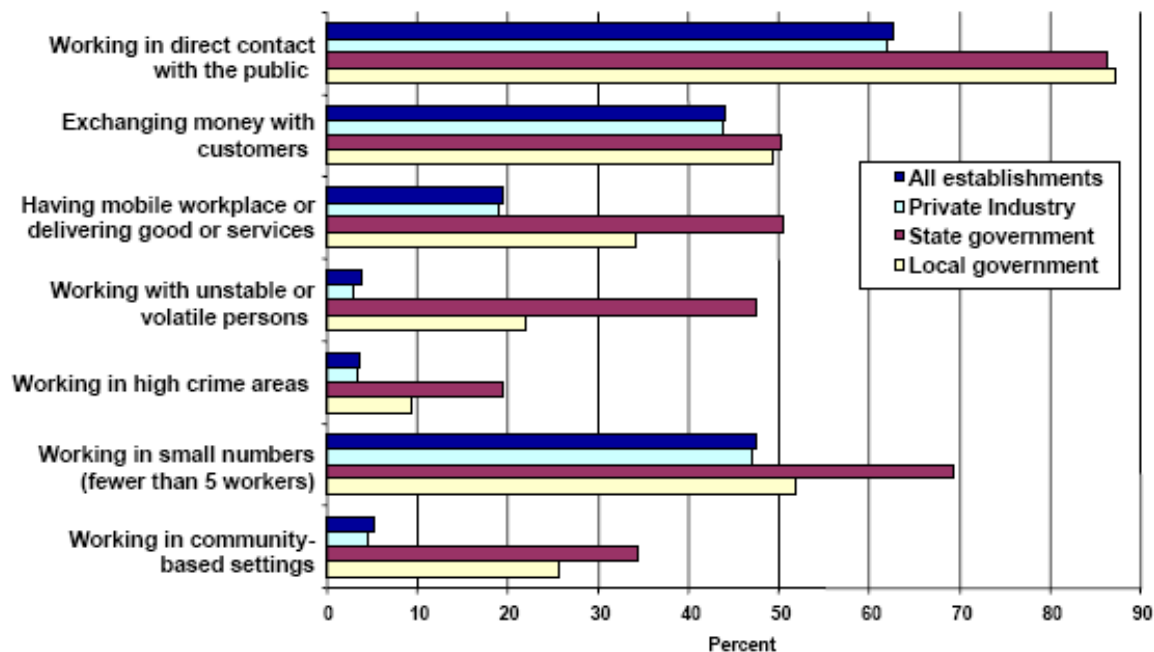
These include:

- The prevalence of handguns and other weapons available in the community
- Jobs that require interaction with the public
- working late evenings or handling money
- Working in isolation
- Working with customers or clients who may be volatile, irrational, delusional, drunk or on drugs
- Working in locations with no way to get assistance by backup communication devices or alarm systems (this is particularly true in high-crime settings);
- Lack of worker training in recognizing and de-escalating hostile and assaultive behavior; and
- Public safety risks while traveling to/from work sites

Could this really happen to me?

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Percent of establishments by potentially hazardous work environment characteristics, by ownership, United States, 2005



The higher reported incidence of workplace violence in State and local government workplaces may be attributed to their work environments. State and local governments report much higher percentages of working in direct contact with the public, working in small numbers or in community-based settings, and other potentially hazardous conditions than did private industry.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Survey of Workplace Violence Prevention, 2005

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How much risk does your job require?

Four Types of Aggressors

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Workplace violence is divided into four distinct types according to the source – known as the perpetrator – of the violence:

- **Stranger** (The person causing the violence is a stranger and comes to the workplace to commit a crime). This type of violence can be random or unexpected. Use caution and situational awareness to avoid stranger violence
- **Client or Resident** (The person causing the violence is the recipient of a service provided in the workplace) This type is especially relevant for service workers. If possible, use behavior strategies designed to deescalate aggression
- **Current or Former Co-worker or Boss** (The person causing the violence has a work-related relationship with someone in the workplace) This type is especially relevant for women. If possible, use behavior strategies designed to prevent sexual harassment
- **Personal Relation** (Like domestic violence, the person causing the violence has some personal relationship with someone in the workplace) Use all available strategies

How to Respond to Aggressions

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- We cannot always control others' behavior, but we can learn some recommended responses to aggressive behavior to minimize the violence
- Some responses are instinctive; other responses are learned. It takes practice and insight to respond safely and appropriately to aggressive behavior
- The goal in this section is two-fold:
 - 1. to protect yourself and others from violence or abuse, and
 - 2. to calm (if possible) the aggressive individual
- Above all, **try hard to remain in good control of your own emotions and actions**

What are Some Response Strategies that Immigrant Women Workers can Practice?

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How to calm down an aggressive person	How might this strategy help?
Face an aggressive person from the side. Do not stand face to face with a potentially violent person	This decreases the chances a violent person will direct their anger at you
Leave Plenty of Space between yourself and the person	Reduces anxiety and the opportunity for assault
Speak slowly & directly in a low or normal tone of voice and use simple statements	Reduces anxiety, communicates control, increases the aggressor's self esteem and offers negotiation as an alternative to escalating behavior
Acknowledge nonviolent behavior. For example: When the person sits down to talk, try stating, "Thank you for sitting with me, I can listen better this way."	Focuses on the person's strength and maintains their self esteem. Communicates the expectation of self control

What are Some Response Strategies that Immigrant Women Workers can Practice?

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How to calm down an aggressive person	How might this strategy help?
Center your statements on the issues concerning the aggressive person	deflects attention away from the worker who has become the target for the violent behavior.
When responding to a client's anger at not being allowed to do or get what they want, try saying, "I'm interested in understanding how terrible that is for you, Mr. Lewis."	Avoids challenging them and expresses interest in their perspective
Express clear expectations of control. For example, "I expect you can control yourself"	Is clear and emphasizes the person's ability to control own behavior
It is probably best not to touch people when they are upset and posing an immediate danger	Shows respect for the person and maintains a comfortable distance, thereby reducing their sense of threat

Summary of How to Deescalate Aggressive Behavior:

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1. Don't confront them by standing face-to-face
2. Keep your distance
3. Speak slowly and calmly
4. Acknowledge non-violent behavior
5. Keep the conversation focused on them, not on you
6. Remind them they are expected to control their behavior
7. Don't touch a person when they are angry

Five Warning Signs of Escalating Behavior

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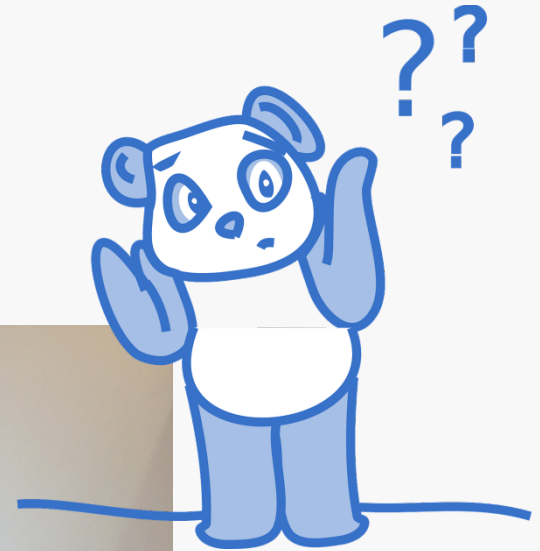
1. **Confusion**
2. **Frustration**
3. **Blame**
4. **Anger**
5. **Hostility**



Warning Signs of Confusion

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- The person appears bewildered or distracted.
- They are unsure or uncertain of the next course of action.



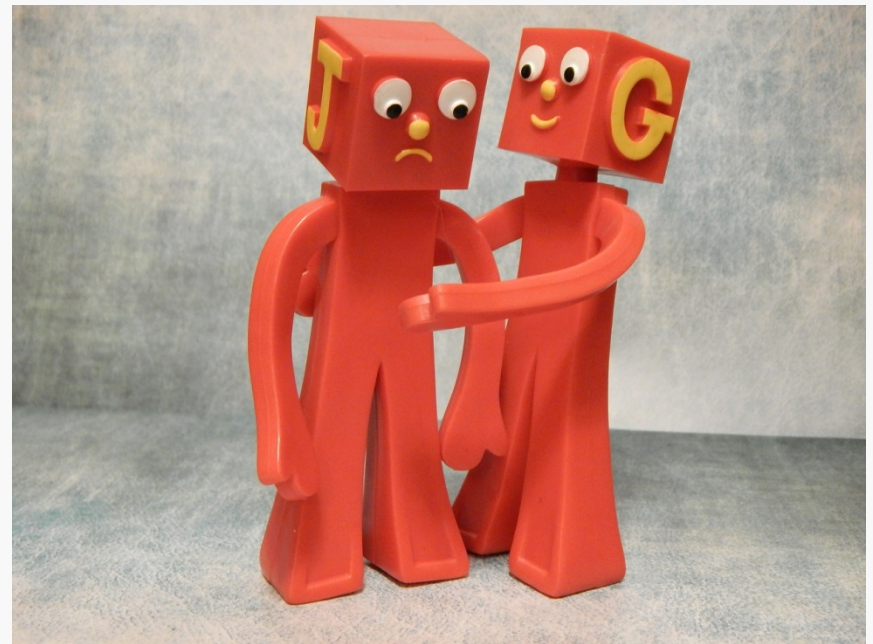
How would you respond to a person who is confused?

updated 02/06/2015

Responses to Confusion

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1. Listen
Attentively to
the person
2. Ask clarifying
questions
3. Give factual
Information



Warning Signs of Frustration

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- The person is impatient and reactive
- The person resists information you are giving them
- The person may try to bait you



Photo by madtreetz on flickr

How would you respond to a person who is frustrated?

updated 02/06/2015

Responses to Frustration

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1. Move the person to a quiet location
2. Reassure them, talk to them in a calm voice
3. Attempt to clarify their concerns



Photo by ttarasiuk on flickr

Warning Signs of Blame

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- The person places responsibility on everyone else
- They may accuse you or hold you responsible
- They may find fault with others
- They may place blame on you



How would you respond to a person who is blaming?

Responses to Blame

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1. Disengage with the person and bring someone else into the discussion
2. Use a teamwork approach
3. Draw the person back to the facts
4. Show respect and concern
5. Focus on areas of agreement to help resolve the situation



Warning Signs of Anger

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- The person may show a visible change in body posture
- Actions may include pounding fists, pointing fingers, shouting or screaming
- This signals **VERY RISKY BEHAVIOR!**



How would you respond to a person who is angry?

Responses to Anger

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1. Don't argue with the person
2. Don't offer solutions
3. Prepare to evacuate the area or isolate the person
4. Contact your supervisor, social worker or a security guard



Warning Signs of Hostility

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- Physical actions or threats appear imminent
- There is immediate danger of physical harm or property damage
- Out-of-control behavior signals the person has crossed the line



How would you respond to a hostile person?

Responses to Hostility

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1. Disengage with the person and evacuate the area
2. Attempt to isolate the person but only if it can be done safely
3. Alert your supervisor and immediately contact security or call for help



Summary of How to Handle Escalating Behavior:

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1. Confusion: listen and clarify
2. Frustration: try to calm them down
3. Blaming: bring in someone else to support
4. Anger: Don't engage them, call for support, prepare to leave
5. Hostility: Evacuate and call for help

Stopping Sexual Harassment

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Although sexual harassment in the workplace is against the law, it is still very common.

Studies show large percentages of women (and even some men) report sexual harassment at some point during their work lives.



Dealing with sexual harassment may be difficult, but ignoring sexual harassment does not make it go away.

Stopping harassment by a co-worker, client, client's family member, visitors, etc.

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- **Say no, clearly.** State frankly that you find the harasser's behavior offensive. Firmly refuse all invitations. If harassment persists, write a memo asking the harasser to stop; keep a copy.
- **Document the harassment.** Detail what, when, and where it happened, and include your response. This information is vital when a pattern of offensive conduct must be proven.
- **Meet with the harasser** (ok to bring a witness). Explain to the harasser that if his or her behavior continues, you will file a grievance with management or seek legal support.
- **Investigate and document.** Talk to co-workers to be sure that the case is legitimate, and document all incidents. Look for witnesses and other harassment victims.
- **Educate & agitate.** Organize discussions on sexual harassment. Find out if others are also experiencing the problem. File a complaint against management for its failure to provide a harassment-free work environment.
- **File a police report**

Group Activities

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- Next we'll practice the strategies we reviewed using small groups
- Please feel free to share your own experiences and discuss response strategies together

Group Discussion

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Mei is a home care worker who had been caring for her client Mrs. Bai for several years. Mrs. Bai is rarely visited by her family, and treats Mei as if she was one of her kids. Mrs. Bai has a son who only comes around when he needs money. When he comes around, Mei feels very uncomfortable.

On his last visit, it was clear he was agitated. He came over yelling and demanding money. He ransacked the apartment looking for his mother's purse. Unsuccessful, he turns to Mei and asks to borrow money in a threatening way. Mei says no, and the son refuses to leave. Mei wonders what to do next.

In small groups, put yourself in Mei's position and think about what she should do:

- 1. What type of workplace violence is this?**
- 2. What should Mei do to try to address this problem?**
- 3. What could she do to protect herself and prevent this in the future?**

Report Back from Small Groups:

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- What advice did your group give Mei?
- Did your group come up with strategies for handling other violent situations?
- How can workers file a claim or support each other?

Reporting a Workplace Violence Incident

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Many violent incidents are not reported by workers. There are many reasons why workers do not report including: workers believe the assaults are part of the job, workers may fear that their employer will retaliate against them, or workers believe that reporting will not benefit them

But being harassed or assaulted is not part of any job description!

All incidents of violence should be reported, no matter how major or minor the injuries are.

Remember that reporting violent behavior may help track violent clients and protect workers!

OSHA Protects Workers Rights

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- Employers must follow workplace safety regulations that protect workers from hazards, illnesses, violence and injuries in the workplace. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration and State partners rely on workers to be the eyes and ears in the workplace.
- Workers have a right to raise concerns with their employers or with OSHA when they see a safety or health problem on the job. The worker has the right to request an OSHA inspection of the workplaces, and be shielded from retaliation for exercising these rights.

Cal/OSHA

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In California, the state government agency called the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), better known as Cal/OSHA, regulates workers' rights to a safe and healthy workplace.

Reporting an Incident to Cal/OSHA

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- Complaints are confidential
- To file a complaint about workplace health and safety hazards, contact Cal/OSHA:
- Oakland District Office
David Hornung
Acting District Manager
1515 Clay Street, Ste. 1303
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 622-2916
(510) 622-2908 (Fax)
DOSHOAK@dir.ca.gov

Take Action!!

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- Talk to other co-workers
- Know who to call if you need help working with an aggressive person
- Organize a support committee to discuss and practice workplace violence recognition and protection strategies
- Report incidents as they happen

Questions

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Thank You!!

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This training was developed by AIWA in 2014 by adapting publicly available materials from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, SEIU Education & Support Fund and the Relational Culture Institute